

36 Overlook Place  
Trumbull, CT 06611  
(203) 268-9588

Appropriations Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly  
State Capitol  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106-1562

February 13, 2023

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am writing to ask that you adequately fund the Connecticut State University system. Considering expiring federal funds, Governor Lamont's proposed budget puts our state universities in a very difficult financial position for the upcoming fiscal year right at the time when we face our greatest level of crisis. This cannot stand.

We must not flat-fund or underfund public higher education, and a record-level state surplus, we do not need to do so. Our public higher education system is in a state of crisis that is not fully realized by the public. Fixed costs are soaring; legitimate demands of students for mental health services and for remedial and developmental services continue to rise in the wake of the pandemic; and state and federal unfunded mandates and new requirements, however well-intentioned, put undue administrative pressure on us.

WCSU is already in a state of financial crisis, and others such as ECSU are not far behind. This fall, WCSU's administration attempted to close several key majors, including Sociology, Political Science, Meteorology, and Economics as a cost-saving measure. We are already cutting these universities to the bone. For decades, state support as a percentage of our budgets has consistently declined. Over the course of these decades, this has forced the system to raise tuition, which is not only contrary to our mission as an accessible public university but also contributes to declining enrollment as we price ordinary people out of our system.

The Lamont Administration points to declining enrollment in the system overall as an excuse for underfunding higher education and then claims that the per-student spending in their budget proposal is the same as in 2015. This claim is so risible as to be difficult to caricature. If businesses were to merely fund their operations at 2015 levels, they would find themselves out of business very quickly.

Our young people are arriving at our university system with learning deficits and emotional difficulties that are the result of several years of interrupted learning experiences during the pandemic. We must not neglect their legitimate needs. We cannot allow them to simply drop out of our public universities. We need to support them. But to do so, we critically need additional resources that we would not have needed in 2015.

When I came to WCSU in 2004, I could say to students with a straight face that they could get the same excellent education that they would receive at much more expensive private universities by going to WCSU. I had resources to support students who wanted to collaborate with faculty research, engage in student activities such as debate or mock trial, and attend conferences. A colleague and I were even able to take students who could not themselves afford to pay for the trip with me to Vietnam to do research. I could point students to our well-stocked library that could adequately support their research and learning needs. Bolstered by that support, my students thrived. One is in a leadership position at the Library of Congress; another just received a Fulbright-Hays fellowship to do doctoral research at the Vietnamese Chinese borderlands.

Today, this level of support is mostly gone, the casualty of many previously tight budgets, and tuition is much higher than it was at that time. We are asking our students to pay more to get less. This is unsustainable. We cannot let our state universities wither on the vine. Please support the additional increases in funding that we need to remain solvent and be genuinely publicly accessible options for a good higher education for the people of this state.

Sincerely,



Wynn Gadkar-Wilcox  
Co-Chair, Department of History and World Perspectives  
Professor of History  
Western Connecticut State University  
CSU-AAUP Council Member